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PLEASE



REFRAIN



FROM



EXISTING

**DESPITE** the lack of affordable housing and increasing gentrification and displacement, U.S. cities have continued to attack homeless people through criminalization. More concerned about keeping homeless people from the public gaze rather than providing housing to people with disabilities, women, children, adults, and elderly people, there has been an increase in anti-homeless laws across the nation, from sleeping to being able to share food. While the criminalization of homeless and poor people is nothing new, it is the steady increase that is most concerning. According to a 2016 UC Berkeley report on California’s vagrancy laws, San Francisco now has 23 anti-homeless laws under its belt, the highest of any city in California. Surrounding Bay Area cities are not much better: Berkeley, Oakland, and San Jose have 12, 14, and 15 anti-homeless laws respectively.

Shining a light on these issues is the recently-published 2016 report “Housing, Not Handcuffs: Ending the Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities” by the National Law Center on Poverty and Homelessness. The researchers have aggregated data from 187 U.S. cities since 2006. Below is a summary of some of the findings from the report.

CAMPING IN PUBLIC

Laws that prohibit homeless people from camping often prohibit them from utilizing any resource that might be their only option for shelter, especially when most city shelters have a long wait-list. 33% of cities prohibit camping in public city-wide, a 69% increase over the past ten years. 50% of cities prohibit camping in particular places.

SLEEPING IN PUBLIC

18% of cities prohibit sleeping in public city-wide. 27% of cities prohibit sleeping in particular public places. Laws against sleeping in public can range from where, when, or how long a person sleeps. For example, in Louisville, KY, sleeping is prohibited “during hours of darkness.”

SITTING OR LYING DOWN IN PUBLIC

47% of cities prohibit sitting and lying down in public, a 52% increase since 2006. These sit/lie laws punish homeless people for resting when they often have no where else to go.

PANDHANDLING

61% of cities prohibit panhandling in particular public places. Sometimes panhandling is necessary for homeless people to survive, and obtain money that they use for medication, feminine hygiene products, and transportation fees.

LIVING IN A CAR

Often times, living and sleeping in a vehicle is a person’s means of surviving without having to live directly on the streets. Still, 39% of cities prohibit living in vehicles.

SHARING FOOD IN PUBLIC

In one of the most ridiculous bans against homeless people, 6% of cities restrict sharing free food in public, under the belief that providing food will encourage homeless people to remain homeless. These types of laws limit homeless service providers and other individuals from serving homeless people food in public.

ON THE RISE:  
AMERICA’S ANTI-HOMELESS LAWS

# SF STEERS TOWARD HOUSING FOR SOME, HANDCUFFS FOR MOST

TJ JOHNSTON

San Francisco is getting props from a national homeless advocacy organization for innovating a model for emergency shelters. But the City's addition of a local ordinance regarding homeless encampments could undercut its overall efforts.

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty lauded the City's navigation center in its report "Housing, Not Handcuffs" as the Washington, D.C.-based organization launched a national campaign on ending criminalization of homeless people's outdoor activities.

Released in November, the report is an examination of 187 cities on their local approaches to homelessness, particularly ones using laws that restrict or prohibit public conducts of homeless people.

At the same time, San Francisco has apparently passed one more of these laws: The city's voters narrowly approved of a measure authorizing the removal of sidewalk encampments with only 24 hours' notice.

Yet, the law center praised the City—as well as Indianapolis; Miami and Dade County, Florida; and Syracuse, New York—for finding constructive alternatives to penalizing their homeless residents.

The law center noted San Francisco's creation of navigation centers as forms of transitional housing with fewer barriers to access than traditional shelters. The report highlighted the navigation center's lack of curfews, accommodations for couples and pets, as well storage spaces for possessions. The law center reported that it's possible to duplicate this model for other cities.

"Although the navigation center is able to serve only a small fraction of the city's 3,500 unsheltered homeless people—indeed, the original location has a maximum capacity of 75—the city has plans to expand the model to six locations," according to the report.

The law center also found that the number of laws that forbid sleeping, camping, sitting or lying in public and living in vehicles have increased throughout the nation in the last 10 years. David Pirtle, public education coordinator of the National Coalition for the Homeless, said that as a disabled person, performing basic human needs during his episode of homelessness made him an outlaw.

"My struggle with schizoaffective disorder left me without a home, but the law in Tempe, Arizona, left me without even a place to sit," he said. "After walking miles in the blistering heat, I was threatened with a ticket for the crime of sitting in public. Criminalizing homelessness doesn't make it go away. It just makes a terrible situation even worse to endure."

Currently, San Francisco has 24 municipal laws prohibiting such public behaviors and enforces them on homeless people. In January, the new tent ban will be amended to the local police code and take effect. The added ordinance stands in contrast with Indianapolis's tent law, which requires a minimum of 15 days' notice and an attempt to secure housing before removing an encampment.

The report has also criticized heavy-handed policies in Dallas, Denver, Honolulu and Puyallup, Washington.

The *Street Sheet*, which the Coalition on Homelessness publishes, is one of over 100 organizations endorsing the law center's campaign. ■

## COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS

The *Street Sheet* is a project of the Coalition on Homelessness. The Coalition on Homelessness organizes poor and homeless people to create permanent solutions to poverty while protecting the civil and human rights of those forced to remain on the streets.

Our organizing is based on extensive peer outreach, and the information gathered directly drives the Coalition's work. We do not bring our agenda to poor and homeless people: They bring their agenda to us. We then turn that agenda into powerful campaigns that are fleshed out at our work group meetings, where homeless people come together with their other community allies to win housing and human rights for all homeless and poor people.

## WORKGROUP MEETINGS

AT 468 TURK STREET

HOUSING JUSTICE WORK GROUP	Every Tuesday at noon
HUMAN RIGHTS WORK GROUP	Every Wednesday at 12:30 p.m.
STREET SHEET ORIENTATION	Monday–Tuesday from 9 a.m.–12 p.m.
STREET SHEET DISTRIBUTION	Monday–Friday from 9 a.m.–12 p.m.

To learn more about COH workgroup meetings, contact us at : 415-346-3740, or go at : [www.cohsf.org](http://www.cohsf.org)

## STREET SHEET STAFF

The *Street Sheet* is a publication of the Coalition on Homelessness. Some stories are collectively written, and some stories have individual authors. But whoever sets fingers to keyboard, all stories are formed by the collective work of dozens of volunteers, and our outreach to hundreds of homeless people.

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INTERNS

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# ACTIVISM AFTER TRUMP

PAUL BODEN

"Organize or Die."

Granted, this Union saying has been around for quite a while but never has it been more true than it is today. Sure, the election results sucked but when you think about what has been happening in America since the so-called Reagan Revolution with its trickle-down economics, elimination of mental health care, and massive increase of homelessness, where we find ourselves today has a certain perverted, twisted logic to it.

Trump didn't come out of nowhere: His election is a manifestation of the neo-liberal economic policies instituted under Ronald Regan's administration, which has continued through every administration since then.

Government for the people, of the people, and by the people was never really factually accurate, but it was a pretty decent goal to shoot for. And it still is. The goal line may have just been moved way back again, but that doesn't make our goal any less worthy nor our work to achieve that goal any less important.

The important thing for accountable community organizations is that we not freak out with the changing tides. Eight years ago when millions of us went into the streets on election day to celebrate Barack Obama being elected as America's first African American (yes, he is American) President, home-

lessness and income inequality didn't magically disappear. Now that America has elected a true blue neoliberal corporate president (who makes Reagan look almost human), we can dispel ourselves of any remaining expectations that OUR government will value the remnants of the New Deal or the Great Society, or clean air or inclusiveness. Forget public parks: They are now public/private partnerships; public schools have become charter schools; public health has become managed care; public housing has been mortgaged off as Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD). Based on early announcements of Trump's cabinet, this trend will accerlerate.

And yet we have to hold firm to our convictions that a government must want those being governed to be healthy, educated, well housed, and well fed. These are human needs all people have and strive for, and certainly ALL People deserve. It's called humanity, and people are called Human Beings. Really, when you think about it, what legitimate government wouldn't want all the people being governed healthy, educated, fed and housed? What form of government wants millions of its people ignorant, jailed, hurting and unhoused, scared of each other and scared shitless of tomorrow? Is anyone that is not straight up facist going to pledge their allegiance to a constitution expounding

those ideals?

Of course not.

And yet, like it or not, that's where we are. The question is: What are we going to do about it?

We are going to stay true to our beliefs and we are going to stay steadfast in our public education, our community organizing, our incredible artwork, our street theatre direct actions, and our celebration of love for our communities and for each other. Why wouldn't we?

Fear and hate might (well I guess it did) get you an office in the White House and a whole bunch of fancy offices on Capitol Hill; it might get their corporate masters even greater profits through exploitation of people, land, air and sea, and it will definitely get them on Fox News.

What it will never get us is a country where ALL people really are equal, where humanity is a gift, and where the legacy we leave for future generations isn't the cash in our bank account but the love in our hearts for the people we share this world with.

*The inherent greed that is the cornerstone of neoliberal economics tells us that it is far more likely Trump is the beginning of the end of this reign of terror... than that he is the beginning of it. Trust us when we say, we will be doing everything in our power to help make that true. ■*

## NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism is the name for the current moment of late capitalism. The purpose of neoliberalism is to heighten the extremes of capitalism—to centralize more wealth for a small few at the expense of the ability to live for most. Neoliberalism is a response to the radical activism of the 1960's and 70's, and a result of the Red Scare and the Cold War. These moments threatened the stability of capitalism, which commenced a project to reinstate the class power of the elite.

Spearheaded by the economic theorists known as the Chicago Boys, the project was first put into practice in the global south as a colonial project, as is exemplified by the Chilean coup d'etat and creation of a neoliberal dictatorship. After it successfully achieved reinstating class power, the project was put into effect in the global north, as was exemplified by the Reagan and Thatcher governments.

Neoliberalism put into practice is free trade (resource theft and colonialism) and laissez faire economics mixed with the deregulation and commodification of everything (identity, resistance, desires). Neoliberalism has meant the privatization of all things public (education, healthcare, housing, space, etc.), the complete destruction of the welfare state which provided some relief to very poor people, the derailing of revolutionary community organizing through the non-profit industrial complex, the creation of contemporary homelessness and a gigantic uptick in surveillance, militarized policing, and incarceration of poor people of color.



I grew up in San Jose. That was where I spent most of my childhood and where I grew up into a young man. The house I lived in there I shared with nine other family members, so it was always pretty crowded. As we grew up my brother and sister both got nice jobs working, but it was hard for me because I had a learning disability and at the public school I was at they didn't give me the support I needed. Instead, they just passed me from one grade till the next so that by the time I graduated from high school I didn't really have any employable skills.

It was around that time that I joined a gang. It felt good at first, like I had a family. My mom passed away when I was 19, and my dad and I didn't really get along, so I needed that kind of community to feel protected. My relatives weren't proud of me for joining the gang, but I stayed in the life for a few years because it helped take my mind off the pain or my mother's death, you know?

Eventually, though, I realized I needed to get out. I was using drugs because that was what the gang expected of me, and it was wearing me down. For a while, I was incarcerated for using drugs. I was miserable there, getting in fights all the time. But I saw the track that the other inmates were on and decided that I had to get myself together and move on. To add on to that, when I was 21 I found out that the girl I had been seeing had given birth to a baby girl, my daughter. Her parents didn't like me and so they moved her to Mexico, far away from me. But the was a clincher for me: I had to find a way out of the gang.

Fortunately, back then it wasn't so hard to leave a gang like it is now. I just moved away, down to Los Angeles. Down there I started working with day laborers, training undocumented immigrants on their rights, and trying to support them. I loved the work, but I had to get out of L.A., so eventually I decided to move up to San Francisco. I moved here in 1992 because

**PEOPLE ARE STRESSED  
BECAUSE THEY NEED  
JOBS AND HOUSING,  
AND WE JUST NEED TO  
BE PATIENT AND LOVE  
THEM. I FELT THAT TOO  
WHEN I WAS HOMELESS.**

a friend offered me a job, but that didn't work out so I quickly became homeless, having to support myself on the streets.

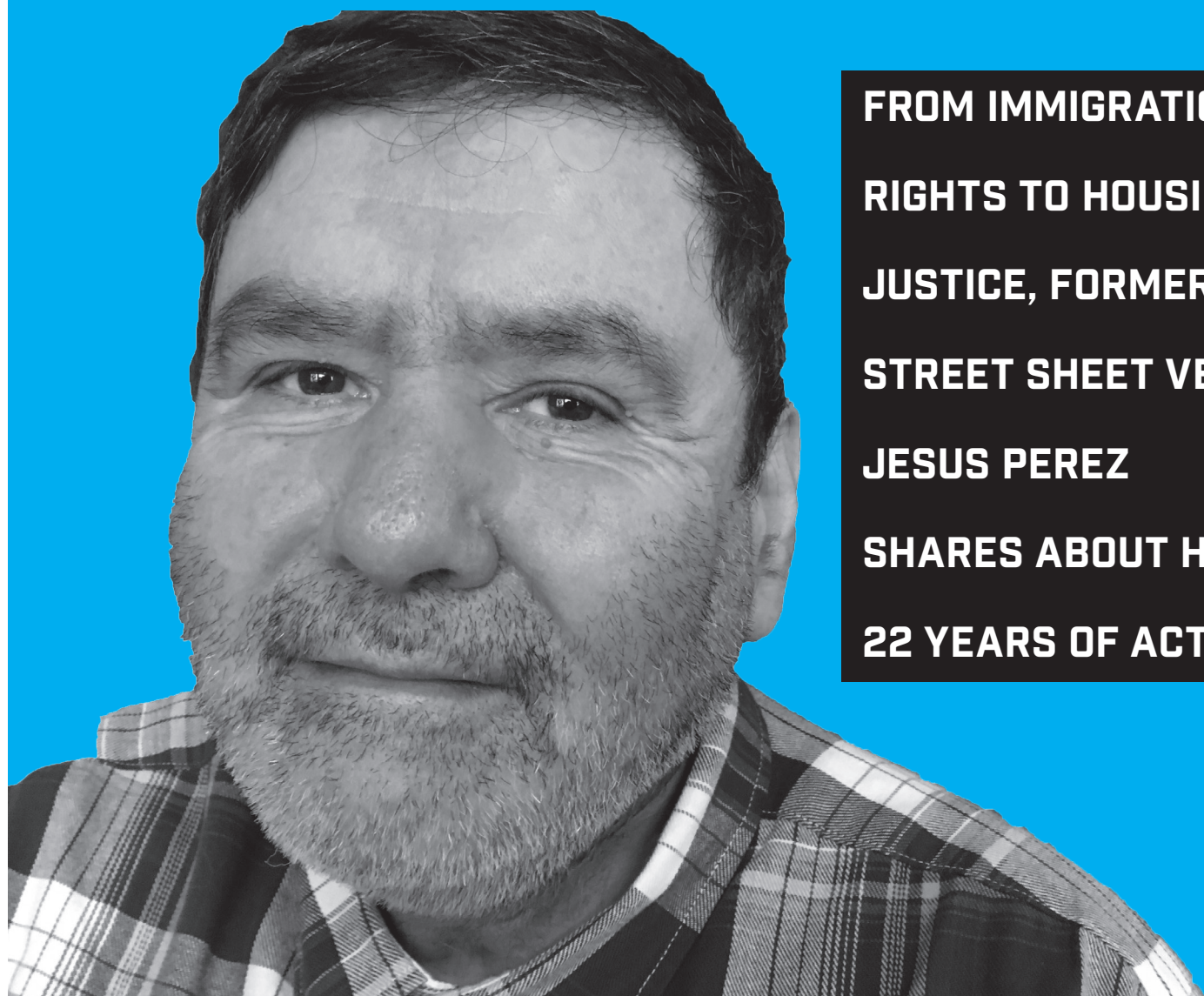
One thing I will say is that San Franciscans were a lot nicer to homeless people back then than they are today. People used to give me a dollar, or smile and wave to me, ask me how my day was going. But today, people just walk by you, man. People seem a lot colder. It also was a lot easier to get into shelter back then. I could just sign up and—BOOM—I'd have shelter for

a week, no waiting list or nothing.

I stayed at a bunch of different shelters back then, and it was a lot easier. Back then you could spend the day out doing what you needed to do, but now they just send you running around trying to get through the red tape. The system is totally fucked up. Every time we get a new mayor they try to overhaul everything, so everyone is confused and trying to keep up. In my day, it was easy, you could get a shelter for the week, now you have to go back every day to get the bed and you have to wait on a long, long waitlist just to get a bed for the night.

While I was staying in the shelters, someone came to do outreach from the Coalition on Homelessness (COH). They introduced themselves, told me they were working on a campaign to end homelessness in San Francisco, and asked me if I wanted to get involved. I did, very much, so I went to the COH and ended up going on outreach with them for the first time in 1993.

Paul Boden, who was the COH director at the time, helped me and some folks start a direct service organization called Ayuda that supported the undocumented community. We started by teaching people their rights, because people didn't know their rights. Then we moved into a bigger space at the Redstone Building and started focusing on support for day laborers in the Mission, doing the trainings there. We also worked with a group in San Rafael trying to fight deportations. Together we collaborated on actions opposing racism and deportations of our undocumented community.



# JESUS PEREZ

## WARRIOR FOR THE PEOPLE

**FROM IMMIGRATION  
RIGHTS TO HOUSING  
JUSTICE, FORMER  
STREET SHEET VENDOR  
JESUS PEREZ  
SHARES ABOUT HIS  
22 YEARS OF ACTIVISM**

In 1994, I was also a *Street Sheet* vendor, selling papers on street corners to get by. It was easier to sell back then because the cops didn't harass you or tell you to leave and there were fewer vendors, so I could make \$35 to 40 dollars per day going around. People who bought papers treated me with respect. Sometimes they would just donate; they didn't even want the paper. But since then people have gotten a lot more hostile.

Eventually, Ayuda ended up combining with COH to become Housing Not Borders. Then, in 2001 we started the SRO Families United Collaborative, working with families in SRO hotels, connecting them with services and giving people referrals. Now our focus is on organizing and making structural changes that can serve homeless families.

I remember one cool project we did was we squatted at a place across from the McDonalds on Haight Street. Squatting was really cool, and we were right down the street from a camp where the police would come with the Department of Public Works (DPW) trucks and then we would videotape the homeless sweeps. The sweeps now are worse than they were then, because now they have hoses and they come and spray people with water, which they never used to do.

Around the year 2000, my daughter tracked me down. At that point she was in her 20s, and had kids of her own. She called me and told me I was her dad, said she wanted to meet me. I was amazed when she called. I was so happy. She was living in Vallejo and I went to go visit her. I got to meet my grandchild for the first

time; they must have been 4 or 5, so young.

My daughter and I grew really close really fast, and now I live with her in Vallejo. I wanted to move there to be with her and our family so I could watch my grandkids get big. My daughter's mother had married, but her husband passed away, and I don't want my grandkids to grow up without a grandpa. I want to be there for them. They are so happy to have me there and it makes me happy to be with them. I get to be the male role model in the household, and I get to help my daughter raise her children.

I still work for the Coalition on Homelessness. After 22 years, my co-workers are like family to me, and I love them. Since I've been here I have lost track of how many amazing people I have got to work with. I love all the volunteers and staff, even though the Coalition is a little hectic to work. It's not our fault; it's the system's fault. People are stressed because they need jobs and housing and we just need to be patient and love them. I felt that too when I was homeless.

We're all fighting for homeless people, for a better system. The Coalition now feels more stronger than it ever has before, and we do a lot more actions than we used to. Maybe that's because in the nineties everything was easier; now we have fight harder to get by. It's important to fight for homeless people because no one listens to them. Anybody could become homeless, you know? Even the rich people could become homeless. So we all have to come together to help people get off the streets, to make sure everyone has a decent place to sleep at night. We all deserve that. ■



# NO HOUSING IN “HOUSING, NOT TENTS” CAMPAIGN: HOW FALSE PROMISES LED TO PROP Q’S SUCCESS



JORDAN BILLUPS

Even though the votes are still officially unofficial as of press time, the majority are reporting and it seems like November 8 was a victory for homeless and low income individuals in San Francisco in a lot of ways. It seems as though the city will pass the local Propositions C (to convert at-risk multiunit residential buildings into permanent affordable housing) and J (to create a Homeless Housing and Services Fund), and fail U (to increase the income eligibility limit on affordable housing units), R (Neighborhood Crime Unit), and P (prohibits competitive bidding for affordable housing projects). Since we

least putting forth financial support for affordable housing or shelters. The “About” section of the website boasts some past accomplishments—two new navigation centers, and reallocated funds for homeless services—but nothing related to the measure, which offered no service provisions. The website also lacks specific information on the housing that would be made available to tent residents, but this is probably because the housing isn’t really that integral to the proposition at all.

While the City already prohibited “the willful obstruction of public sidewalks” or sitting and lying on the sidewalk (from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.), the law did

states that only 16 percent of homeless persons are victims of domestic abuse at all. Using such a heavy campaign comes at a price: success. Nobody wants to harm victims of assault or domestic violence, so it’s an easy and powerful way to clearly assign a “right” and “wrong” to an issue, even if the reality is far more complex and untrue.

They construe a certain image of tent encampments as extremely dangerous, one which is damaging and lasting and paints shelters as the lesser of two evils. Many people who live in tent encampments actually report that they feel safer in the encampments. The group of tents acts as a sort of neighborhood, maintaining that there is safety in numbers, and sometimes even functioning as a small community. And while living on the street does significantly increase an individual’s chance of experiencing abuse or assault, it is also far more likely to be assaulted or abused in a more physically vulnerable position like an open mattress on a sidewalk than in closed-off space like a tent.

Some of the most popular advertisements for the Yes on Q campaign were quick 15- and 30-second clips that, to the average viewer may seem harmless or unbiased, but definitely possess the same negative tones which accompany the majority of the media representation of homelessness—with one man citing the new hardship of needing to spend a year testing his blood for HIV after stepping on a dirty needle left behind by a neighbor from the nearby tent encampment. The idea that these people living in encampments are a burden as hazards existing in “Unsafe and Inhumane” conditions is particularly harmful, but also effective. This “Growing Health and Safety Problem”, the Yes on Q website dubs tents, is evaluated on the increase of complaints on homeless encampments to the city’s 311 help line and police department. People are easily persuaded by fear, and it is unfortunately too easy to convince the mass majority of consumers that there are other people out there whose very existence threatens their own personal safety.

The Q campaign leaned a lot on the Oxford English Dictionary’s word of the year: Post-truth. Post-truth is when appeal to emotion is more effective, and therefore more important, than actual facts—such as “Housing Not Tents.” Even though there is simply no housing involved in Q’s ballot initiative, the idea of countering domestic violence and sexual assault, while simultaneously promising housing was simply more enticing. This political movement run on lies and emotions looks like it may have passed, unfortunately resulting in not only the furthering of harmful stereotypes and stigmas on homelessness, but an additional systemic disadvantage for the already disenfranchised. And while this

may be discouraging, it is not hopeless: Walls can be broken down as easily as they are constructed, and even in the face of misinformation and manipulation, there will always be those who fight for the justice and equality for all. ■

## SPEAK ON IT! HOMELESS SPEAKERS BUREAU

**When:** THURSDAY 12/15/16 @ 10:30 AM

**Where:** Coalition on Homelessness, 468 Turk Street between Hyde & Larkin

**LUNCH IS PROVIDED.**

**What:** Often when policies or decisions are made on behalf of the homeless community, homeless voices are left out of the process. Often when stories about homelessness are written in local newspapers homeless voices are ignored or neglected.

With the belief that homeless folks should have a voice in decisions and policies that impact their lives, the Coalition On Homeless is establishing a Speakers Bureau to give voice to those experiencing homelessness.

One of the best ways people can gain understanding of what it’s like to experience something they have never been through is to hear from someone who has had that experience talk about it. The Homeless Speakers Bureau offers that opportunity.

Join us on Thursday, December 15, 2016, at the Coalition On Homelessness at 1:00pm for our Homeless Speakers Bureau training. Bring your Voice!



may still be able to get the city to fund J without the income, the failing of K may be moot anyway, it seems the minor issue is that the public voted no on M (to create the Housing and Development Commission) and the major issue is that Q passed.

Prop. Q (“Housing Not Tents”) was initially polling a lot further ahead than the just 1.7 points over the required majority lead, but that may have been due to the success of their campaign of misinformation. Prop Q’s website, [www.housingnottents.com](http://www.housingnottents.com), states that the initiative would “help move homeless San Franciscans out of tent encampments and into shelters, supportive services, treatment and housing.” Even the name “Housing Not Tents” implies that the prop will provide an alternative to the tent encampments, and that this alternative will be housing, or at

not specifically outright ban tents on the sidewalk ... until Q. What the Yes On Q vote did was allow the police to provide residents of tent encampments 24 hours’ notice before a forcible clearing-out, with their options being one night in an available shelter bed or a one-way bus ticket out of San Francisco, while the resident’s personal property is seized and stored away by the city, and then it’s discarded after 90 days.

The Yes on Prop Q campaign focused on the danger of sexual assault happening in tent encampments. A video posted on their Facebook claims “one of the number one things of why these tent encampments are so dangerous is because of the assaults.” Even a source from one of their own articles—which indicates that domestic violence was the second highest cause of homelessness behind “inability to pay rent”—



# “BULLETS DO NOT HAVE NAMES ON THEM”

## BEYOND HOUSING: ONE FAMILY’S STRUGGLE

ARENDS SKOVMOELLER

Most of us consider our home as a place in which we rest, regroup, and feel safe. It is where we store our belongings, are able to shut out the world for a while, and simply be ourselves.

However, for 59-year-old Rita, getting into public housing has yet to provide her with any of the qualities mentioned above. Rita has therefore made the brave decision to share her story with the Street Sheet in order to raise awareness of the many dangerous hassles, which numerous low-income San Franciscans face every day.

Rita’s struggle to obtain a safe place to call her own started in 2005 when she returned to San Francisco because her mother got sick. Unable to find any affordable housing, Rita stayed in various temporary placements until she and her then six and nine-year-old daughters received a place in Sunnydale through the San Francisco Housing Authority.

Shortly after moving in, Rita encountered what was to become a substantial part of the years to come: crime, violence, gun shootings, gang bangers and corruption.

Listening to Rita’s story, it is difficult to keep track of the many times she and her children had to pick up and leave because they felt unsafe. They have bounced back between shelters and housing so many times that even Rita struggles with the exact chronology of the past 11 years, although she keeps all her paperwork.

However, while talking with Rita, it quickly becomes apparent that an accurate timeline isn’t relevant to her story. The problems and dangers she has dealt with over the years all seem to be the same, regardless of the housing she was in at the time. Sunnydale, Double Rock (Alice Griffith), Robert Pitts, Mercy Housing, Potrero Hill, Golden Gate Village, North Beach Place: All of this public housing has failed to provide Rita with a safe and secure environment for her to raise her children in. The caring mother of five, Rita’s number one priority was always her kids.

“It’s like it’s hopeless, but you have to keep in mind that you have a child that you’re raising. You can’t let your child know about all of these things going on around you. All you want is a safe place to raise your family.”

As an example of everyday life in the public housing, Rita recounts several occasions where she had to barricade her front door with a two by four and a piece of wood to prevent strangers from trespassing—even at times when she was at home herself. “I had to worry about these doors being opened, even though I had an iron gate on them.”

Break-ins and robberies have made up a considerable amount of Rita’s life in public housing. She remembers one day coming home and finding that all of her belongings were gone. It later turned out that her neighbor at the time had stolen them, which Rita discovered one day as she passed the neighbor’s apartment with the door open, and saw all her missing things inside.

On other occasions, the recurring theft happened more subtly: Rita’s medication would go missing, as would meat and other

**“YOU CAN’T LET YOUR CHILD KNOW ABOUT ALL OF THESE THINGS GOING ON AROUND YOU. ALL YOU WANT IS A SAFE PLACE TO RAISE YOUR FAMILY.”**

cooking supplies kept within her own private premises. During one period of time, the theft was so consistent that Rita had to pack her food and other immediate belongings in a carrier to take with her every time she left her apartment, even just to run a quick errand.

“I would honestly, just as you see the homeless people with the shopping carts pushing all their belongings. I would have to take all of my groceries, freeze them up, put them in an ice box in my cart along with all my medication, my clothes and go down the street every day like this. So when I came home at night, at least I knew I would still have food and clean clothing for my kids.”

Rita is a former drug addict and still easily recognizes the smell of various drugs. Blunt, dope, crack: Rita describes how she smelled them all on her apartments



Rita in her current home.

throughout the years.

“Somebody was using my house for a party house. I’m a non-smoker. I’ve been clean and sober for more than 30 years, I can smell narcotics.”

During her time at Mercy Housing, Rita was living on the twelfth floor at the time and explains how the fire alarm was pulled on many occasions. This meant that Rita would have to leave her apartment and go down all the stairs, as the elevators couldn’t be used during a potential fire. Rita suffers from diabetes, back pain and has trouble walking. “We were new tenants, we followed the rules, we’d come out of the apartment, go down stairs, wait for the fire department to clear the building for us to come back in. But by the time you come back in, somebody had been in your house.”

Rita backs up these constant experiences of harassment by the many other families, she saw fleeing Mercy Housing, just after having moved in: “I kept wondering how come people were moving into Mercy Housing, new buildings and all, but then moving out again.” Rita and her daughters lasted in Mercy Housing for almost a year themselves before Rita, once again, made the decision to pack up and leave. “It was stressful and it was dangerous. I would rather go back to a shelter ‘cause it felt safer.”

Rita considers some of the main issues and dangers of public housing to be some of the staff working there, who she believes are corrupted. As Rita says: “I think that housing authority staff, some of them, stopped caring. Today everybody’s eyes are everywhere else than what they need to be focused on.” According to Rita, a specific member of staff in one housing even claimed that Rita hadn’t paid her rent on several occasions, when she actually had. Rita therefore started wiring her payments so she could keep track of them. She also recently found out that her current mail-

ing address has been passed on for others to use. This has forced her to shut down her mailbox and instead pick up her mail at a post office box—just as she did when she was homeless.

Another key problem with public housing is the negligence and lack of maintenance of the properties in question. During her time in Potrero Hill, Rita witnessed several gun shootings to the buildings. Afterwards, the holes left in the walls were simply painted over, causing severe water damage throughout the time she lived there.

Water damage is, of course, not the worst consequence of a gun fire. To this day, Rita still fears for the lives of herself and her children as violence is prevalent in the public housing. As Rita says, “bullets do not have names on them.”

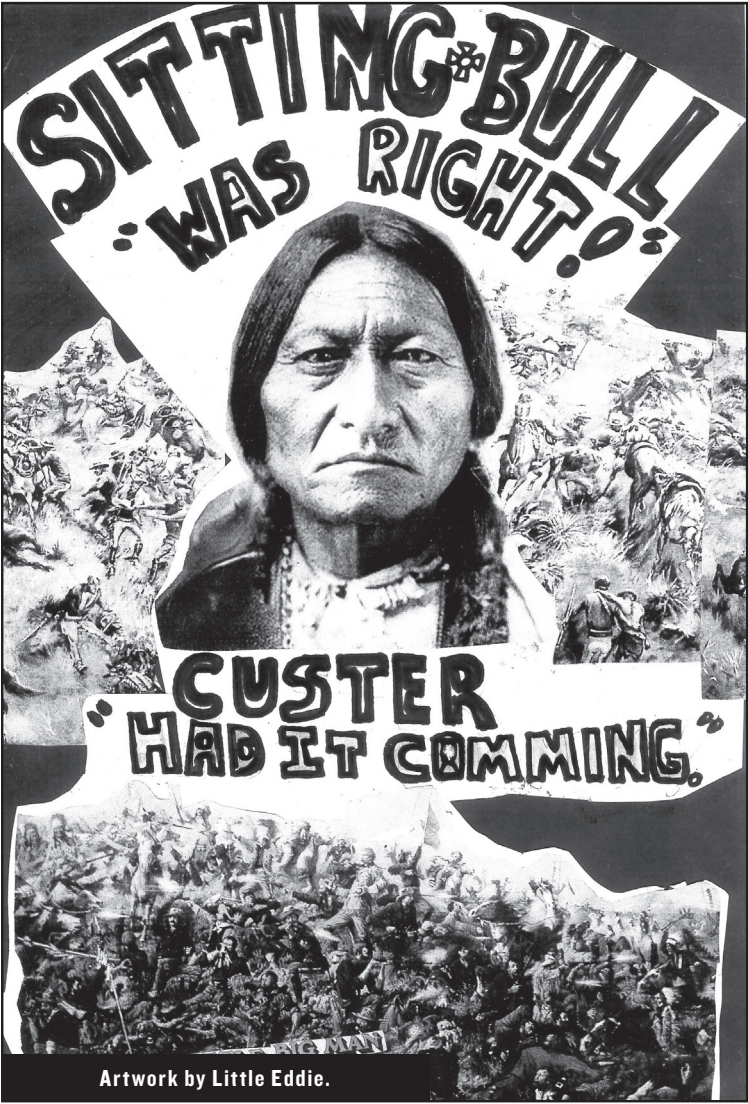
For someone who has never experienced homelessness or lived within public housing, it is difficult to fully comprehend an everyday life of constant harassment and danger. The irony of it all is that housing almost always is the goal and dream for homeless folks. But where do you go from there, when what’s offered you turns out to be equally as dangerous as living on the streets?

Rita remembers a time when living in public housing was still safe and neighbors took care of one another, which makes Rita wonder, “How did San Francisco Housing Authority get so terrible? It used to be nice and smooth, but like I said, since 2005 it’s really been a struggle for me and my family to be safe here.”

Hopefully, Rita’s story will inspire more people to speak up and share their experiences within the system. As it is the case with most issues concerning those less fortunate, change will not come on its own. We have to continue to fight for what should already be a common basic right for all citizens in a city as wealthy as San Francisco: A safe and secure place to call your own. ■







Artwork by Little Eddie.

VISIONS

I DREAMT THAT I WAS A ROSE  
& BLOOMED FAR INTO THE SKY

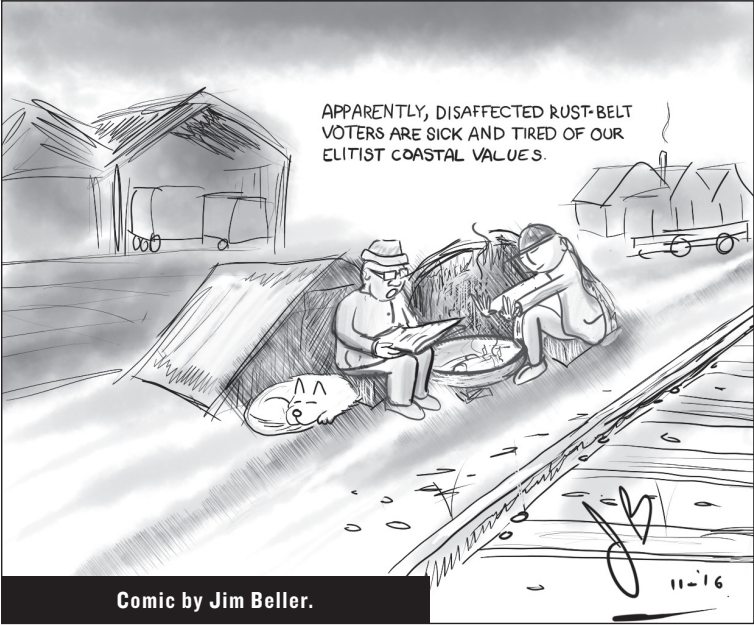
I DREAMT I WAS AN EAGLE  
& COULD SOAR OVER ANY MOUNTAIN TOP

I DREAMT THAT I WAS ALONE  
& LIVED LIFE OUT TO THE FULLEST

I DREAMT I WAS IN HEAVEN  
& WAS ENLIGHTENED BY THE SPIRIT

THEN I DREAMT I WAS REBORN  
& WORK UP TO A NEW WORLD

Poem by Jac.



Comic by Jim Beller.

WRITER'S CORNER

- 1) THINK OF SOMETHING YOU LOST THIS ELECTION. WRITE THE POEM YOU WOULD READ AT ITS FUNERAL.
- WRITE A POEM STARTING WITH THE LINE: HERE LIES...
- 2) WRITE ABOUT WHAT YOU HOPE GROWS FROM ITS GRAVE.

This writing prompt is brought to you by **GHOSTLINES**. Ghostlines is a Bay Area collective of poets, artists, and educators comprised of Ariana Weckstein, Gabriel Cortez, Isabella Borgeson, Jade Cho, and Natasha Huey. We are committed to using art to cultivate empathy. To disrupt violent systems and thought. To nurture and challenge ourselves and our communities to rise. [WWW.GHOSTLINESCOLLECTIVE.TUMBLR.COM](http://WWW.GHOSTLINESCOLLECTIVE.TUMBLR.COM)

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DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS 2016



The Coaliiton on Homelessness' altar.

WE HONOR AND CELEBRATE THE LIVES OF:

MARIO WOODS  
LUIS GONGORA PAT  
JESSICA WILLIAMS  
LAUREN ALDEN  
MATT DODT  
THOMAS MYRON HOOKER  
RON MERRITT, JR.  
NATHANIEL PEARSON  
JORGE GARCIA  
GEOFFREY PICKUP  
WILLIAM ANDERSON AND  
KATHLEEN ARMSTRONG &

THE COUNTLESS OTHERS WHO HAVE DIED FROM THE  
SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE OF POVERTY AND POLICE VIOLENCE

SPECIAL THANKS

The staff and volunteers of the Coalition on Homelessness thank the following STREET SHEET. Your continued support has been vital in keeping the STREET SHEET on the streets since 1989.

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“Descending Motion, Market St.” San Francisco, CA

Helping us to reflect on the daily life of our streets, photographers offer one picture that represents their personal take on urban life.

**About the artist:** San Francisco native and former San Francisco Fire Department Lieutenant, Dwayne Newton used the same approach in one profession to the other – being close. “It’s all about being there.” This philosophy and his photography has allowed him to witness the world through his viewfinder, documenting the full spectrum of the human condition in 30 countries, in all conditions and seasons. In the words of famous photographer Robert Capa, “If you didn’t get the photo, you’re not close enough.”

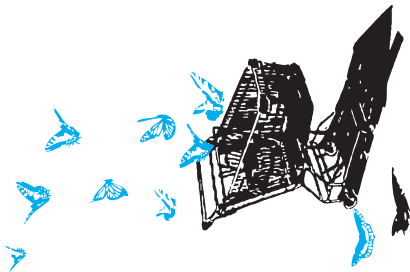
**About the photo:** As America is waking up after the tumult of the elections, like a shadow, the beast is slowly making her marks all over the country. People start to realize too late, that what was a bad dream might very quickly turn into a nightmare. ■

PHOTO: DWAYNE NEWTON WWW.DWAYNE-NEWTON.COM

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